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### DOES YOUR FRIEND WEAR A RING?

If he does, has it ever occurred to you that he may have concealed in it a supply of poison for use in combatting his fiercest enemies? At any rate, you would have been justified in such an assumption four centuries ago!

One way of ridding one's self of troublesome characters, we are told, was to hand them a key in the shape of a finger ring and ask them to unlock a certain chest or cabinet. When a slight pressure was exerted upon the ring there was released a minute needle which pricked the holder of the ring and injected a fatal poison. Others reserved the poison for their own use in sate suicide seemed the only solution—as in the case of the great Hannibal.

All rings with compartments in them, however, were not designed to serve such dire purposes, for, it is said, they sometimes contained cosmetics—the prototype of the modern vanity case only much more convenient! Other rings contained relics or pictures, an interesting example of the latter being the case of the loyal friends of Charles I, who secretly cherished his likeness in their rings in defiance of the Roundheads.

The advantage of wearing the key upon the finger in the form of a ring is of course obvious, particularly when it guarded chests of precious stones and metals, since this seemed to be the easiest way to prevent both loss and theft of the key. Still another use for the ring was that of personal protection. One ring, we are told, rendered its wearer invisible by his simply turning it about on his finger so that the setting rested against the palm of his hand.

And what could be a more convenient adaptation of the modern ouija board than the finger ring? Possibly one of your ancestors was among those to use their rings to divine the future. A simple process was to lower the ring on a slender thread over a table bearing the letters of the alphabet which, when joined by the ring, spelled the desired answer. To contribute to the solemnity of the occasion, the holder of the ring was attired in linen only and a circle shaved round his head.

Perhaps the one practical use of the ring which has been most universal and enduring is as a seal. The earliest examples of rings show this use, which seems to have continued uninterrupted down through the Middle Ages.